

Marana gets reprieve from FEMA flood-plain plans

Some homeowners would have had to buy insurance

By Erica Meltzer

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Marana received a reprieve this week from a FEMA plan that would have put 10 square miles into flood plain and required owners there to purchase flood insurance.

The town still needs to conduct a drainage study to prove those areas are not at heightened flood risk, but engineers will have until October 2008 to finish the study.

FEMA originally had planned to issue new flood-plain maps last month.

Town officials said they are confident the study will demonstrate the areas in question are not at heightened risk for flooding.

As part of a nationwide effort to redraw flood-plain maps, the Federal Emergency Management Agency determined Interstate 10, the Union Pacific railroad tracks and the Central Arizona Project canal acted like levees but could not be expected to provide actual protection from sheet flooding off the Tortolita Mountains.

Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, D-Ariz., announced the change Wednesday after receiving a letter from FEMA Tuesday promising to work closely with local officials and extending the time for the town to conduct studies.

"This is huge for us," Town Engineer Keith Brann said. "It assures us from FEMA's standpoint that while these features do affect floodwaters, they will work with us to determine the actual effect."

Town officials credited Giffords with helping resolve the situation by introducing legislation that would have changed FEMA's mapping procedures.

Brann said the town would prefer for that legislation to be pursued, even though the issue is resolved for now.

"Administrative solutions can be reversed, but legislation could cement it," Brann said.

Giffords believes the legislation no longer is necessary, said Giffords spokesman C.J. Karamargin.

"FEMA's decision to deal with this administratively achieves the goal that she wanted," he said. "It is fairly definitive. She considers it a victory for common sense."

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